



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

1400 South 19th Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718-5496

Greetings,

Thank you for taking the time to attend the recent bison scoping meeting that was held in Kalispell. We estimate that approximately 40 individuals attended this meeting. Public scoping is an initial step in the development of a programmatic environmental impact statement that will examine the future of bison in Montana as wildlife. Attached you will find a compilation of all of the comments as they were recorded during the recent meeting in Kalispell. We have transcribed the comments that were submitted during the meeting exactly as they were recorded. There are a few instances where the handwriting was not clear and the comments reflect this. Please review the comments and let us know if there are additional comments you would like to submit. Fish, Wildlife, & Parks will be accepting public comments via regular mail, e-mail, or online through June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The comments that were captured at each of the regional meetings and those submitted outside of the meetings will be available for review on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks website following the closure of the comment period.

We would like to thank you again for attending the recent meeting and hope that you will remain part of this process as Fish, Wildlife & Parks moves forward with the development of the programmatic environmental impact statement.

Sincerely,

Arnold Dood and Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks

## **To Submit Comments or Gain More Information**

<b><i>FWP Website:</i></b> <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/bison/future.html#scoping">http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/bison/future.html#scoping</a>	<b><i>Written Comments:</i></b> MT FWP Bison Plan Scoping ATTN: Arnold Dood 1400 South 19 <sup>th</sup> Ave Bozeman, MT 59718	<b><i>E-mail Comments:</i></b> Bison_Management@ mt.gov
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# Kalispell Public Scoping Meeting May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

## Issues and Concerns:

- Bison starving
- What about areas where bison are not hunted (where people can enjoy them)
- Winter management? Bison from YNP too many—can we contain them/feed hay, etc.
- Stick to the management plan (Not following will lead to overpopulation. & degradation of land)
- Herd Stress
  - Breeding
  - Disease
  - Interactions with cattle
  - Social interaction of bison
  - Quality of life for bison
- Concerned that wherever they are released that they will be free roaming. They will roam more than a few miles. It will impact a large area.
- Could we encourage movement for grazing (Burn it)
- Bison do move
- Bison move to food source
  - Water sources?
- Human Safety
- Migration- is there a fence design that would control bison, while allowing other ungulates to pass?
- Tough on fences
- Bison go through gates, not fences, so problems are no there. Natural progressive dealer. They feed in one direction.
- Make clear issue of brucellosis. I don't think FWP is doing a good job of clarifying issue of brucellosis. And settle that issue.
- Concerned about health issues – brucellosis. If we lose brucellosis.-free status it's hard on livestock industry.
- Disease control - testing pre
  - Maintain a disease free herd?
  - Annual Testing?
- Brucellosis is very important.
- How are you going to control issue of brucellosis
- Vaccinate bison for brucellosis.
- If we use YNP bison, we would be allowing National Park Service to escape directly dealing w/the brucellosis hot zone.
- YNP disease situation should be addressed regardless of if we have plan or not. Disease needs to be eliminated.
- Brucellosis testing would be a big expense to ranchers.
- Has YNP considered testing all of their bison? & other health issues.
- How is science being proven about Brucellosis transmission via elk/bison to cattle?
- Plan of action if disease is detected
  - Alert livestock owners
- Any alternative should include appropriate turn-around time on testing and disposal of waste?

- No reintroduction without a contingency plan
- Concerned about disease testing for cattle w/ bison present. People buy beef from a brucellosis free state. Worried about losing that status. MT economy will take a huge hit, tax dollars, if we lose the status. How would you test wild free roaming bison?
- Drastic over-testing for bison. if free roaming vs. other free roaming wildlife
  - Elk also carry brucellosis.
  - Good majority of animals can carry brucellosis.
- Genetic integrity of free roaming bison
- Genetics- why are we bailing out YNP?
- Metapopulation
- Natural corridors that allow bison to interbreed
- Assisted movement natural corridors (through artificial movement of genetics)
- Ensure hunting is a tool and maximize federal lands for restoration of bison
- Suspect vast majority of hunters would support addressing issues identified.
- Want huntable herds, whatever size (1-200) they would be with no restrictions on archery.
- Who determines # of permits (hunting)
- Hunting for primary population control + other conflicts such as disease, safety
- Local Hunting right concerns
- Why can't commercial Bison be hunted?
  - Private vs. Public – Privatization cost issue
- MBA: huntable herd somewhere that would qualify for p&y/BC
- If hunting is allowed, provide for sustainable nutrition for all hungry people & for non-edible uses (taxidermy etc....)
- If bison are managed by FWP, 3W they would be wild bison not livestock. In doing so they would be funded by sportsman's dollars, so develop a good hunting program. Better than YNP area bison hunts.
- If there is restoration to occur habitat should be a major factor. Habitat should be a major issue. Location!
- Concern about experimenting with bison in habitats where they have not been in a long time.
- Who determines carrying capacity?
- 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Ranch Family, when bison were found they were almost dead, not enough seed, what will happen to animals if the habitat & food is not there?
- Bison herd needs to be at least 1,000 (data)
- Social perspectives for the bison in small herd
  - What is optimal herd size?
- Property rights.
- Create laws that keep people from becoming criminals by standing up for private property rights. People will take care of their property.
- I want to protect my property from bison & maintain my private property authority.
- Plum Creek leases are private
- How does this relate to eminent domain? Is there authority?
- Eminent domain cannot be used to accomplish bison mgmt.
- Opposed to this. Bison next to my ranch have caused trouble.
- Property damage hunts should be an option. For sportsman.
- Landowner concerns will be the largest hurdle so establish zones of impact.

- Bison can do more (roam) than livestock
- Haystack damage – Is there going to be game damage assistance
- Compensation for the taking of private property. for impacts due to the bison.
- New priority for public grazing lands changes the contract for producers. Will there be compensation?
- If there is “take” their needs to be compensation.
- Could producers be compensated for bison production in lieu of cattle to provide for an income (like CRP) where would those funds come from?
- Any plans for compensation (fence damage?) Help keep the peace
- Either/or situation is often made for bison & cattle – contrast Henry Mountains –where they graze together.
- Assumption that bison will mix w/livestock & vice versa
- Bison mix with cattle? Rancher has to test
- Competition between bison & livestock
- Is much known about ecological relationship between bears (Primarily Grizzly) and Bison?
  - More food source for bears
  - How would this reintroduction affect Grizzly bear distribution?
- Sensitive time for biodiversity
- Overgrazing
  - How would we fund to re-seed
  - How much is bison intake on the grasses
- What does overgrazing look like?
- We don’t re-seed behind elk Ex. RMEF does restore
- Are there other animals/plants that bison used to interact w/that are no longer here
- Create a full ecosystem
- Overgrazing vs. creation of natural mosaic
- Interrelationships to other wildlife (not ungulates)
  - Ex. Nongame/birds
- When bison are brought in it will affect all the other wildlife.
- When bison are established, are we going to “adjust” all other ungulates (Dratch & Gogon) – Is this going to be another wolf fiasco.
- Has MT considered establishing bison hunting opportunities as revenue generating device?
- Added extra costs to rancher near restoration sites
- Would impact MT. economy
- Largest provider of beef to U.S. is Texas. They have not had a brucellosis – free status many year & price. Elk have brucella, & we can sustain a herd of bison to replace government meat at 10 \$/lb.
- Would there be any additional costs, above normal operating costs, to ranchers surrounding restoration sites for anything
- How much economic impact of hunting in-state vs. out-of-state? Other costs in relation to other species i.e. elk, deer
  - Cost of bison on landscape vs. revenue generated
  - Social implications on national level
- Measured costs to ranchers
  - Weeds, fencing, etc.
- If bison & cattle are grazing together, & we pay leases to PCTC & BLM, who is going to pay for those AUM’s.

- Economics – detrimental & positive
  - Ranching
    - Haystacks
    - Fences
    - Livestock
  - Positive photography
  - Ecotourism
  - Tourism
- Bison herd caused 20x of loss to a haystack compound – if that continues to happen, the cost of everyone's meat will increase & small ranches will suffer economically. Local options for beef will be gone.
- Systemic problems in cattle industry & food system overall
- Cardiac disease/Diabetes are an issue – bison should get priority over cattle for nutrition.
- 100-200 bison will not feed the public.
- Will there be long-term community impacts?
- Will there be long-term community impacts?
  - Do not focus only on short-term.
- Concerned about public safety & the economy & habitat differences. This is not the 1600's. MT is much more populated.
- Considering shutting hunting down on my ranch if FWP does this, or until decides not to do it.
- Bison plan should not reduce hunter opportunity or damage landowner relations.
- Fear is a personal opinion. In the future this can be another tool for run people off their land. Fear that this would be a program to have no people in this area.
- If MT is going to reintroduce non-domesticated herds, let it be done well, with a sense of pride, and not become like the boom towns & with destruction because of privatization. Concerned about commercialization of bison – no ranching for wildlife.
- Fear – fear of a broken treaty or promise. – to keep the residents of MT from access to other state natural resources. No federal bison program.
- Ranchers are conservationist but rules they have to follow are dumb
- It's a grazing right issue, so feed our children on/off Reservation to meet Treaty & obligations of our government. The government is not their to support private industry rather it is their for the good of the public. Public property should be for the good of the people.
- With all of public land in MT. Priority should be given to restoration. This should be a priority over commercial grazing.
- We continually erase the line between private & public lands. Bison in a herd should be on public land & not private land. Public lands grazing rights for bison. Public herd has to have priority on public land. Destruction of private property is primarily by deer & antelope & we do not remove them as they are huntable resource.
- Public lands should be for wildlife restoration or public use.
- Domestic livestock graze/access public lands
- Ranchers want graze/access for domestics but not bison
- Parties in conflict over shared public land
- Competition between current leases (DNRC? AUMs? BLM? USFS?)
  - Does the presence of B. decrease available AUMs?
  - Does the presence of B. decrease available AUMs?

- Fundamental question for livestock Industry
- If they are turned into wildlife instead of domestic, things are going to get ugly.
- Resident bison as a wildlife opportunity versus zoo animal.
- When the bison were in the Thompson Brand Inspector was involved, & cost \$, for DOL. So they should be livestock.
- Fully support Bison – value them for historic value/as wild/for the State Important to Montanans
- Bison as livestock. Vs wildlife
- Who retains ownership of the Bison?
- Who is responsible for management?
- MT needs to identify legal designation & particularly are they going to be managed for hunting?
- It is illegal to transfer Brucellosis positive bison any where in the State
- State retains full authority of the program (bison).
  - (multiple participants agree)
- MT law against waste of any part of a bison that is hunted or destroyed to protect private property.
- Regulatory quagmire of bison
  - Effort to move to reasonable alternative is difficult/complicated process
- Domestic herds/tribal herds
  - Testing
  - Do tribal herds fall under Dept of Livestock
- Where will the Bison come from? And how many?
- Source population?
  - Securing sources to reach sustainable ecologically functioning population
- Environmental concerns, community health concerns – looking for this process to give weight to the science & data. Environmental difference between cattle & bison. Involve data that relate to differing habitat use patterns between cattle & bison.
- Do a test in an area with a smaller herd with the least potential conflicts
- Funding for before and after studies for every restorations
- Use S. Dakota badlands herd as a model
- Historical Research – Historical habitat movement matters
- Commercial Bison not used for education
- Should be viewed as an opportunity for education system
- Worried about perceived fears & how to address them relative to science & reintroduction.
- Public could be better educated
  - Needs to be better outreach for sportsman/ranchers/all
- Fix misconceptions re: bison for conserve
- Rather not see this happen until FWP can prove they are capable of managing the different species, lands, and regions? (currently)
- Be honest with American sportsmen
- Pittman-Robertson act doesn't allow to spend on anything but wildlife, no trust in FWP about that.
- Hard to have faith in public mgmt.
- Share more evidence for both pros & cons for management issues. Do not just flower up the positives. For example information on meeting boards
- How would FWP justify not reintroducing bison given their history of reintroducing other species?

- Spotted Dog process did not help restoration process
- Process guided by science not usurped by politics
- Primary opponents are ranchers
- FWP cannot please everyone. Too many interacting issues.
- Where did this idea come from? (non livestock bison)
- Look at problem honestly – check out data. USFWS/FWP/Parks need to use experts. They will take care of themselves.
- State opinion need to be primary concern thru the process . . . beyond that of national opinion
- Influence of interest Groups
  - D of I Hunting
  - D of A Lobby
  - Concern that these types of groups have more influence than less organized influence
- This process should put this decision back in the hands of the public of Montana
- Huge concern that this be a federal program. Americas farmers & ranchers deal with this day in day out.
- Should partner w/outside groups (APR e.g.) to address valid concerns about bison. State bring in other players.
- Promote a national bison plan that integrates the state's for reintroduction of genetically pure bison & habitat needs.
- Programs across states need to work together towards the common health and well being of bison herds.
- Tribes have the right to deal with their own property.
- Every buffalo is between 700-1300 lbs per bison. Edible & healthy to disease & famine. Help our children as you promised. (Ft. Peck Sioux) 'Our grandfather is Floyd Youngman, chairman, first one to bring bison to Sioux people. Honor treaty rights. When put on Reservations we were starved & given inferior meats. Opportunity to feed people on public lands.
- Would the tribes have any input?
- Tribal sovereignty, is done on Tribal lands if is a Tribal issue, not a political issue.
- If tribal issues, what court would the issues be settled in?
- Indian tribes should have access to genetically diverse, disease-free bison to manage as they see fit. For cultural & economics. What happens on the Rez. should stay on the Rez. – OK on the Rez. but no where else.
- Any CSKT territory would need to include the tribe as a partner
- How do bring back a large animal to the landscape & bring it into different tribal programs in MT.
- Honor treaty promised quickly.
- Native people need to be taken care of with bison.
- If we have free roaming bison on Tribal lands what will happen when they move off.
- Tribal concern/Treaty Rights
- Who's paying for the reintroduction?
- Not interested in Buffalo Commons.
- Look up Y2Y as example
- Commercial concern are separate from federal concerns
- How does that differ from existing refuges? Or commercial.
- Buffalo along the highline & let them be our TSA.
- My trenches are healthier.

## Alternatives:

- Considering alternative of not transplanting
  - no active alternative
- I oppose any free roaming bison here in MT.
- FWP should manage YNP bison that come out through sportsman. Don't spread others around.
- Don't put bison on WMA's.
- No bison should go to APR or similar outside groups in MT
- Create a bison herd on public lands to reduce deficit & sustain native & non native peoples.
- Areas set aside to reintroduce are not suitable sites.
  - (Thompson River & others)
- Suitability of Thompson River as suitable range was based on misinformation. Area is forested, escaped Bison survived winter by depredation on local haystacks
- Most of land in Thompson River is private (Plum Timber Company)
- Mixed restoration
  - Small herds plus large herds
  - different locations
- Add Fish Creek WMA as potential site
- Lost Trail NWR as a potential restoration site
- Excluding federal leased lands
- Add Lost Trail NWR as a potential site
- Add Spotted Dog as potential site.
  - Revisit
- No Bison reintroduce where they were not historically
- Think Landscape Scale vs. small remnant, isolated herds
  - Go BIG or Go HOME
- Look at historical aspect of wildlife restoration in MT. Honor the wildlife restoration heritage in MT. Bison were left out. CMR Refuge would be good start.
- A herd on the CMR will not impact the Thompson River.
- Consider spotted Dog WMA for a huntable herd.
  - Consider the wilderness complex as well
- Splitting hairs between private & public lands. Deal with separately. FWP & USFWS look at sustainable bison herds for the people on public lands for food (for those that are hungry).